The CHURCH MESSENGER

BELARUSIAN AUTOCEPHALOUS ORTHODOX CHURCH

"CARKOUNY PASLANIEC"
ENGLISH EDITION - PUBLISHED BY

THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. CYRIL OF TURAU, 401 ATLANTIC AVE., BROOKLYN, NY 11217-1702

MAILING ADDRESS, CHURCH MESSENGER, P.O. BOX 5982, SOMERSET, NJ 08875-5982

VOL. 2 **PASCHA 2001** **NO. 1**

CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!

The Catechetical Address of St. John the Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople On the Great Feast Day of Pascha



"If any man be devout and loves God, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast. If any man be a wise servant, let him rejoicing enter into the joy of his Lord. If any have labored long in fasting, let him now receive his recompense. If any have wrought from the first hour, let him today receive his just reward. If any have come at the third hour, let him with thankfulness keep the feast. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him have no misgivings; because he shall in nowise be deprived therefore. If any have delayed until the ninth hour, let him draw near, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness; for the Lord, Who is jealous of His honor, will accept the last even as the first; He gives rest unto him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as unto him who has wrought from the first hour. And He shows mercy upon the last and cares for the first; and to the one He gives and upon the other He bestows gifts. And He both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention, and honors the acts and praises the offering. Wherefore, enter you all into the joy of your Lord; and receive your reward, both the first, and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast. The table is full laden; feast you all sumptuously. The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away. Enjoy you all the feast of faith: Receive you all the riches of loving-kindness. Let no one bewail his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shone forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it. By descending into Hell, He mad hell captive. He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh. And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry; Hell, said he, was embittered, when it encountered You in the lower regions. It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was overthrown. It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains. It took a body, and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen. O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are over thrown. Christ is risen, and demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen form the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen.

Paschal Hypakoe

Before the dawn, Mary and the women came and found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They heard the angelic voice: "Why do you seek among the dead as a man the one who is everlasting light? Behold the clothes in the grave. Go and proclaim to the world: The Lord is risen. He has slain death, as He is the Son of God, saving the race of men.

Kondakion Tone 8

Thou did descend into the tomb, O Immortal, Thou did destroy the power of death. In victory did thou arise, o Christ God, proclaiming "Rejoice" to the myrrh-bearing women, granting peace to thy apostles, and bestowing resurrection on the fallen.



A Sermon on St. Thomas Sunday
First Sunday after Pascha

by

St. Cyril, Bishop of Turau

" The Church requires a great teacher and a wise interpreter to adorn the feast. But we are poor in word and dim in mind, and we lack the fire of the Holy Spirit to compose words to benefit the soul. Yet for the love of the brethren that are with me, I shall say a few words concerning the renewal of the Resurrection of Christ.

Last Sunday, the day of Holy Pascha, was a day of wonderment in the heavens and of trepidation in the depths; of renewal for creation and of deliverance for the world; the destruction of Hades and the extinction of death; the resurrection of the dead and the abrogation of the power of the devil's delusion, and through the resurrection of Christ redemption for all of mankind; impoverishment for the Old Law and enslavement of the Saturday sabbath; enrichment for the Church and the enthronement of Sunday.

Last Sunday all things were transformed: earth became heaven, cleansed by God from the defilement of demons; angels and women humbly celebrate the resurrection. Creation was renewed: no longer does man worship nature as 'god', neither the sun nor springs nor trees; no longer shall Hades receive infants slaughtered in sacrifice; no longer shall death receive honor. For through the mystery of the cross the worship of idols was ended and the violence of devils was vanquishes, and through faith in Christ mankind was not only redeemed but sanctified. By the rejection of the blood of the calf and the sacrifice of the goat the Old Law was utterly impoverished for Christ Himself offered Himself as a sacrifice to the Father for all.

And thus because of the resurrection the celebration of the Saturday sabbath was terminated, and grace was bestowed upon Sunday, and now Sunday is the ruler of days, since on that Sunday Christ arose from the dead. O my brethren, let us crown the empress of days, and let us bring gifts of honor to her in faith! Let us give to our utmost, such as we are able! One may give charity, kindness, and love, another pure virginity and true faith and unfeigned humility, another the singing of the Psalter and the teachings of the apostles and prayers rendered unto God with sighs. For God Himself, through Moses, says: 'Do not appear before me empty on the day of the feast.' Let us then offer unto God the virtues of which I have spoken, that we may obtain His mercy, for He does not deprive of His kindness those that come to Him in faith. As it is said: 'I will honor them that honor me.' And let us therefore praise fittingly this new Sunday, on which we celebrate the renewal of the resurrection.

For this is called St. Thomas Sunday, not the high feast of Pascha Sunday. Pascha is the deliverance of the world from oppression by the devil and the liberation of the dead from the depths of Hades. But St. Thomas Sunday is the renewal of the resurrection. It is prefigured in the Old Law, which God bequeathed upon Moses in Egypt, saying: 'Behold, I deliver my people from the bondage of Pharaoh and I liberate them from the oppression of their taskmasters, and you shall renew the day of your salvation, in which I defeated your enemies, Israel.' And behold, now we also renew in celebration the day of Christ's victory on which He wrought salvation for all the world and defeated the princes and the power of darkness.

This is why the Artos (paschal bread) has lain blessed in the church from Pascha until this day. And on this day it is broken over the priestly hands as the unleavened bread that was carried from Egypt on the heads of the Levites across the desert until they crossed the Red Sea and consecrated the bread to God and tasted it and became well and fearsome to their enemies. And the Israelites, delivered from the bondage of their flesh, renewed in celebration the day of the unleavened bread; but we delivered by our Lord from that Pharaoh of the mind, the devil, we renew the day of victory over the evil ones. Taking now this blessed bread, we taste of it, just as the Israelites tasted of the heavenly angelic food; and we preserve it for all manner of good purposes, for health of body and salvation of souls and aversion of ills.

On this day the old is ended, and behold, all is become new, all things visible and invisible! The heavens have stripped off the dark clouds like coarse garments and are filled with brightness, and with the bright air they proclaim the glory of the Lord. By 'the heavens' I do not mean the heavens that are visible, but the heavens of our understanding, of the apostles who on this day came to know the Lord that came into their midst on Sion. And they cast all sorrow into oblivion, and cast off the vexation of their fear of the Jews, and were blessed by the Holy Spirit, and openly proclaim the resurrection of Christ.

Now the sun in its finery rises to the heights, and it delights as it warms the earth. For Christ, our Sun of righteousness, rose for us from the tomb and saves

all that believe in Him. Now the moon has descended from the highest rank and does honor to the greater light; for now, according to scripture, the Old Law, with Saturday sabbath, has waned, and through the prophets it honors the law of Christ. Now repentance thaws the winter of sin, and the understanding of melts the ice of unbelief. For the apostolic teaching and faith of Christ have thawed the winter of the nations, idolatry, and Christ showing His ribs melts the ice of Thomas's unbelief.

On this day spring in its finery brings life to earthly nature, and the winds of the storms waft gently and make fertile the fruits, and the soil feeds the seeds and gives birth to the green grass: for this fine spring is the faith that delights in Christ, which in baptism brings rebirth to humankind. And the winds of the storms are our sinful designs which, transformed by repentance to virtue, bring fertile fruits for the good of our souls. And the soil of our nature receives the word of God as seed, and labors ever in the fear of God and gives birth to the spirit of salvation.

Now the trees send forth their shoots and the scented flowers bloom. And behold, already the gardens send forth their sweet smell, and the gardeners that labor in hope call on Christ, the Giver of fruits. For before we were as trees of the forest bearing no fruit; but now Christ's faith is implanted in our faithlessness, and already we are grafted to the root of Jesse and spout good deeds like flowers, in expectation of heavenly regeneration in Christ. And the holy men also, laboring in the Church, expect their reward from Christ. Now the tillers of the word lead their oxen in the word to the yoke of the spirit, sinking the plow of the cross into the furrows of minds and drawing the furrow of repentance and sowing therein the seed of the spirit and delighting in expectation of the blessings to be.

On this day the old is ended, and behold, all is become new on account of the resurrection!

Now the rivers of the apostles swell with water, and the fish of the nations spawn their progeny, and the fishers explore the depths of God's Incarnation and gain a full net of their catch for the church. 'For,' says the Prophet, 'the earth shall be rent with rivers and the ungodly shall see and shall sicken.

Now the busy bee, in the figure of monks, displays its wisdom and makes all amazed. For just as monks dwell in the wilderness by the fruits of their own labors and amaze both angels and men, so also bees alight on the blooms and create honeycombs. Such are the sources of sweetness for men and of benefit to the Church.

Now all the sweet-voiced birds of the chorus of the clergy delight in their nesting. For as the Prophet said: 'Yea, the bird has found himself a nest, even Thine altars.' And they sing, each his song, praising God with voice unabating. On this day the ranks of all the saints are renewed and receive new life in Christ. The prophets and the patriarchs, after their labors, repose in the heavenly life; and apostles and holy men, after their sufferings, are praised on earth and in heaven; and confessors and martyrs, who suffered for Christ, are crowned with the angels; emperors and princes are saved through obedience; and the choirs of the virgins and the ranks of the monks, that have borne their cross with endurance, follow Christ, the First-born, from earth up to heaven. And the fasters and hermits receive their reward from the hand of the Lord for their labors, and delight with the saints in the heavenly city.

This is the day of the feast of the renewal of Christ's resurrection for new people, and on this day all things are brought new unto God: from the nations new faith, from Christians new offerings, from priests new sacrifices, from the mighty concern for the Church, from the righteous wisdom in humility, from sinners repentance, from the ungodly a return to God from adversaries the spirit of love.

And also, brethren, let us now ascend in our minds to the mount of Sion: for there it was that the apostles were gathered, and there Christ Himself appeared among them, though the doors were locked and said, 'Peace be unto you' and filled them with joy. For the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord, and they cast aside all sorrow of the flesh and fear of the heart. For their souls were endowed with a boldness of spirit when they recognized their Lord, for He bared His side, and He showed to Thomas the wounds from the nails on His hands and on His feet. For Thomas was not with the disciples when the Lord first came. And when he heard that the Lord was risen, he did not believe: not because he thought it a lie, but because he wished to see Christ with his own eyes. This is why he said: 'Except I shall put my hand into His side and my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe.'

Therefore, without reproaching him, the Lord spoke thus: 'Reach hither thy hand, and behold the piercing of my sides, and believe that I am who I am! Before you the patriarchs and the prophets knew me and believed in my incarnation. Consider that which was first written about me in Isaiah, as it is said: "His side was pierced with a spear, and there came forth blood and water." I was indeed pierced through the ribs, but thereby raised Adam, who fell into sin because of his rib. And do you think I shall overlook you, just because you doubt me?

'Touch me, that I am who I am, as Simeon previously touched and believed and asked to depart in peace. Be not faithless like Herod, who heard of my birth and said to the wise men: "Go find where Christ is born, that I also may come and worship Him," while in his heart he was scheming to kill me. But even though he slaughtered the infants, yet he found not the one whom he sought. For the evil, though they may seek me, yet shall they find me not.'

'Believe in me, Thomas, and know me, as Abraham knew me and called me Lord when I came to

him in the shade with two angels, and he entreated me on behalf of Sodom, that I should not destroy it if there be found in it ten righteous men. Be not faithless like Balaam, who, though he foretold through the Holy Spirit my death for the world and my resurrection, yet was tempted for gain and perished.'

'But believe in me, Thomas, that I am who I am, whom Jacob saw being affirmed on the ladder in his dream in the night; and whom he knew again in the spirit when I wrestled with him in Mesopotamia, when I promised him that I would be incarnated in his tribe. Be not faithless like Nebuchadnezzar, who, though he saw me in the furnace saving the youths from the fire, and though he called me truly the Son of God, yet he turned again to the error of his ways, and he perished.'

'Believe in me , Thomas,, That I am who I am, whose figure Isaiah saw on a high throne, surrounded by a multitude of angels. I am He who appeared to Ezekiel in the midst of the living creatures as the figure of a man: and of Ezekiel I prefigured you also as the wheels that went up with the living creatures which were lifted up with me; for the spirit of life was in the wheels, as now I have breathed the Holy Spirit into you. I am "the one, as the Son of Man" whom Daniel beheld coming with the clouds of Heaven to the Ancient of Days, and Daniel wrote that to me God "was given the dominion and the kingdom in Heaven and on earth now and in the everlasting age to come." My friend, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands: the hands which I opened the eyes of the blind and gave hearing to the deaf and mad the dumb well in speech. Behold also my feet: the feet on which I walked before you on the sea, and ascended in plain view through the air, and descended to the nether darkness, and Trampled Hades, and went with Cleopas and Luke to Emmaus. Therefore be not faithless, but believing.'

Thomas answered and said: 'I believe, Lord, that You are Christ Himself, my God, whom the prophets wrote about and foresaw in the spirit, and whom Moses prefigured in the Law, and whom the high priests and the Pharisees rejected, and whom the scribes of the Jews reviled in their envy, and whom Pilate and Caiaphas gave up for the crucifixion, and whom God the Father raised from the dead. I see Your sides, from which You shed blood and water: water that you might cleanse the earth of its corruption, blood that You might sanctify mankind. I see Your hands, with which in the beginning You created all creation, and planted the Garden, and made man, and with which You blessed the patriarchs, and with which You anointed kings, and with which You sanctified the apostles. I see Your feet, which the sinful woman touched and received forgiveness for her sins, and to which, before that, the widow had stooped and received back her son alive, with his soul, from the dead, and over which the woman that had an issue of blood touched the border of the garment and was healed from her infirmity. And I too, Lord, believe You are God.'

And Jesus said unto Him: 'Because thou has seen me thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen me, and yet have believed in me.'

Therefore, O my brethren, let us believe in Christ our God, let us worship Him that was crucified, let us glorify Him that was raised from the dead, let us believe in Him that made Himself manifest to the apostles, let us sing the praises of Him that showed His side to Thomas, let us praise Him that came to give us life, let us confess Him that brought us forth into the light, let us magnify Him that bestowed upon us an abundance of all manner of blessings, and let us know Him, one in the Trinity, our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory with the father and with the Holy Spirit.

Prayer of St. Ephraim

O Lord and Master of my life,
Grant not unto me a spirit of idleness,
of discouragement, of lust for power
and of vain speaking.
But bestow upon me, Your servant, the spirit of
chastity, of meekness, of patience, and of love.
Yea, O Lord and King, grant that I may perceive
my own transgressions,
and judge not my brother.
For blessed are You unto ages of ages. Amen.

St Euphrasinya

Troparion Tone 4

Having spent your wealth upon the poor, and accounted as naught the renown of a princess, you did disdain a temporal betrothal, O beauteous virgin. And having betrothed yourself to Christ your Bridegroom, you did bring to Him your spiritual and bodily purity as garland, O Euphrasinya. Wherefore, as you stand now before Him, remember us who venerate your memory.

Kondakion, Tone 4

We bless you, O glorious Euphrasinya, who has adorned your chaste and honorable virginity by almsgiving, as a lamp with oil, and has entered into the most radiant bridal chamber of Christ with the wise virgins. And falling down before your venerable relics, we delight in their fragrance And cry out to you with compunction: Since you have boldness before Christ God, pray that we be delivered from the stench of the passions and that our souls be saved.



The Life of St. Euphrasinya, Venerable Abbess of Polatsk Protectress of Belarus

St. Euphrasiniya lived in the twelfth century and was born with the given name of Pradslava. Historical calculations place her birth to have taken place in the years 1101 or 1104. In the eleventh century, Polatsk was ruled by Brachislau Izyslavich from 1001-1044 and by his son Usyaslau Charadzey from 1044-1101. St Euphrasiniya was born into the family of prince Svyatslav-George, the younger son of Usyaslau Charadzey.

As a child Pradslava studied at the school attached to the cathedral of St. Sophia in Polatsk and in the prince's court. She was taught by monastics and spiritual people reading about the lives of the saints and Holy Scripture. She visited the churches in Polatsk and especially St. Sophia's Cathedral which was richly filled with beautiful iconographic frescoes. She also had the opportunity to read the writings of the Holy Fathers of the Church including St John the Chrysostom, St Basil the Great, St Ephraim the Cyrene, St. John of Sinai as well as Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the evangelizers of the Slavs. When she reached age twelve, she was considered to be ready for her parents to seek a proper suitor and arrange a marriage, as was the practice of the time. Her parents decided to give her in marriage to a son of a wealthy family. Everyone thought that she would choose this life which was a typical woman's life at that time; raising children, taking care of domestic chores and concerns and waiting for her husband to return from his travels or hunts. To everyone's surprise, Pradslava had another life in mind. She left home secretly and went to a convent where her aunt, the widow of Roman Usyaslavich, was the abbess. There she implored the abbess to tonsure her into the monastic habit. Her aunt greeted her and asked, "How can I do this my child? Your father will surely send his wrath upon my head. And you are still very young. How will you endure this monastic life?" Pradslava, however, insisted and begged the abbess to be tonsured. The abbess, seeing Pradslava's love for Christ and her desire to offer her life up for Him, agreed and Pradslava was tonsured on march 25 on the feast day of St. Euphrasinya of Alexandria and given the new name Euphrasinya. When her father, Svyataslau-George, learned of these events he was stricken with grief and began to pull his hair out. Her mother, Sophia, began to refer to her as though she had died.

St Euphrasinya was successfully convinced her parents not to lament but rather to rejoice in her decision to dedicate her whole life to Christ.

In the convent, St. Euphrasinya prayed steadfastly, fasted and worked together with other nuns always maintaining her humility. She then asked Elias, bishop of Polatsk, for his permission to live in a monastic cell which was built next to St. Sophia's Cathedral. In this way she imitated the virgins of Old Jerusalem, one of which was the Most Holy Birth Giver of God and Ever Virgin Mary. [Those virgins would live next to Solomon's Temple in special cells built next to the wall of the temple.] Bishop Elias saw that the saint desired to live the angelic life and gave his blessing for her request. When she was not praying , she recopied books, sold them, and gave all the money to the poor.

One day in her sleep, St. Euphrasinya saw an angel of God who took her by her hand and led her to the place called Seletz. Here there was a building and a small Church dedicated to Our Savior. The angel said, "You must stay here, because through you God will lead many to salvation on this spot." This vision was repeated a second and third time. She did not know what these dreams meant but thanked God that she was granted these visions saying, "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready!" Similarly, the bishop saw a vision with an angel which told him, "Lead the servant of God Euphrasinya to the church of Our Savior in Seletz and settle her near the church so that there may be a convent of consecrated virgins there, whom God wishes to save through Blessed Euphrasinya. Her prayer ascends to God as fragrant myrrh, and the Holy Spirit will rest on her, as on the head of a king. As the sun shines through the world, so will her life shine before God's Angels." When the bishop awoke from sleep, he went to St. Euphrasinya to tell her of God's will. She told him about her visions and they both thanked God. The bishop then called together Prince Boris, St. Euphrasinya's uncle, and her father along with other influential men to explain to them his vision. He explained, "In your presence I grant Euphrasinya a place near the Church of Our Savior in Seletz, so that there may be a convent of virgins there. Let no one hinder her or take away that which I have given her." Everyone consented to the bishop's directive.

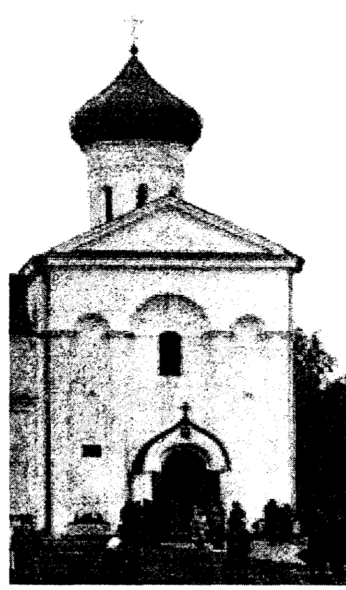
They moved St. Euphrasinya near the church and built a convent for virgins who wished to serve the Lord in chastity. She became a teacher and taught the nuns accordingly. The older ones she taught patience and self-restraint. The younger ones she taught purity

of the soul, chastity, humility, guarding against gluttony, to be silent when near elders, to listen to the wise, be humble to the elders and to show love without conceit.

After a while, St Euphrasinya asked her father to send her sister, Hardislava, in order that she might learn the holy books. Her father agreed and sent her sister. St. Euphrasinya taught her younger sister how to read these books and spent much time with her in soul saving conversations. She encouraged her sister to become a bride of Christ and to accept the monastic tonsure with the name of Eudakiya. After awhile their father sent someone with a message to St, Euphrasinya to send her younger sister home. However, St. Euphrasinya replied, "Let her stay with me longer. She has not fully learned the Holy Scriptures." When her parents found out about the tonsure her father became angry and exclaimed, "What have you done to us? You have added to our old sorrow a new sorrow and to one grief still another grief. Was it not enough that you left us? But now you have taken another child who is dear to us! Did we give birth to you and bring you up for this? Did we give birth to you so that before your death you would confine yourselves in these black robes, as in a coffin, join a convent and deprive us of those pleasures which we expected from you." St. Euphrasinya comforted her parents reminding them of the importance of the salvation of our souls. With this they became somewhat comforted and returned to their home.

Soon thereafter, princess Zvenislava, the daughter of her uncle Boris, came to St. Euphrasinya bringing with her costly garments which were prepared for her marriage and said, "My sister and mistress! I consider all the riches of this world to be nothing; I give these wedding ornaments to the Church of Our Savior. I wish to become a bride of my Lord and God in spiritual wedlock, and to bow my head under His good and light yoke." St. Euphrasinya accepted her with great joy and ordered that she be immediately tonsured with the name Eupraksiya. Both were very close. They prayed and fasted ferverently and became as though they shared one soul.

The number of nuns in the convent had steadily increased and St. Euphrasinya saw the need to build a stone church in the name of Our Savior. With God's help and her diligence, a beautiful church was built. John, the man who was overseeing the project heard a voice in his sleep. "John! Get up and go and oversee the construction of the church in honor of the Pantocrator (Savior)." He at once went to St. Euphrasinya and asked her whether she had sent someone to wake him and to begin his work speedily. She answered him she was not the one who sent him the voice but God and so he should listen and do what God had instructed him. The construction was near completion and all that was needed were some bricks. St. Euphrasinya prayed, "I thank You, O Master, Lover of Mankind, Almighty God! You Who has given us greater things, give us also these smaller things, so that we may finish the construction of the church which is being built to the glory of Your all holy Name." The next morning the builders found the kiln full of fired bricks, which had cooled already and were quite strong. These bricks had been prepared by unseen hands overnight in a very short period of time. Everyone rejoiced and thanked God. When the church was completed, the bishop with the other clergy came to bless this church along with the princes and residents of the city. St Euphrasinya fell to her knees in the church and prayed, "O Lord Almighty, knower of hearts, look down on this temple built in Your Name, as You once did look upon the temple of Solomon. Look down also on the rational flock which has been gathered around Your Temple. Be merciful to all of us who serve You in this holy temple. Give us help in every good deed, so that none of the sisters will be seized by the wolf who destroys the souls of the people, the devil. O Lord, be for us a weapon and strong shield, so that we may not be touched by evil and may have no wound approach our bodies. Do not destroy us for our sins. We put all our hope in you, for You are a God merciful and charitable to all who believe in you. To You we send up glory until the end of our lives." St. Euphrasinya began to teach the sisters saying, " I have gathered you for the sake of the Lord's name just as a bird gathers its young under its wings. I have gathered you as the sheep of God on the divine pasture: graze then in the commandments of the Lord and progress in the virtues from strength to strength, so that I also may with joy, and not with sorrow, care for your salvation, teach you, and rejoice in spirit, seeing the spiritual fruits of your labors. You yourselves can see with what great efforts I saw the words of God on your hearts. However, sometimes the fields of your heart seem to remain unripened, and not grow in the virtues, while the time of the harvest draws near. The winnowing fan is already on the threshing floor and it will separate the chaff from the wheat. My sisters, I fear that perhaps among you might be chaff, which will be given over to inextinguishable fire. Therefore I entreat you to hasten, and to preserve yourselves unharmed from these sinful tares, so that you may escape the fire of gehenna. Prepare yourselves to be clean wheat of Christ; perfect yourselves by your labors of fasting, struggling in humility, chastity, love and prayer. Then you will make from yourselves bread which is pleasing to the Lord."



The Church of Our Savior, built by St. Euphrasinya as it appears today

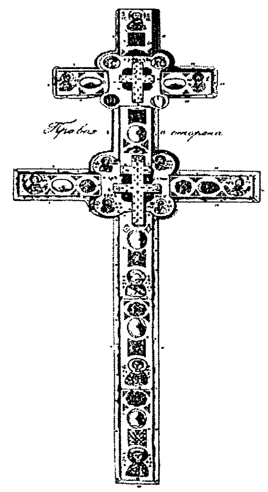
thanks to her instruction and prayers, all the nuns progressed in the life of virtue and made of themselves vessels worthy of becoming the dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. Besides the church of Our Savior, St. Euphrasinya built another stone church in honor of the Most Holy Birth Giver of God. Filling it with icons she gave this church to the monks and built for them a monastery near this church which was located 1 mile from the city of Polatsk.

St. Euphrasinya her convent to have the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos, called "Directress, which was one of the icons painted by St. Luke the Evangelist during his lifetime. She knew of three icons painted by St. Luke, one located in Jerusalem, another in Constantinople, and a third in Ephesus. Tearfully she prayed and then sent a convent servant, Michael, to Constantinople to the pious Emperor Manuel and to the Most Holy Patriarch Luke. She sent many gifts to them requesting that they send her one of the icons namely the one located in Ephesus. Seeing her great zeal they agreed and sent the icon with the servant along with a blessing from the patriarch. When she received the icon she was filled with great joy and gave thanks to Our savior Jesus Christ and His Most Pure Mother. She then placed this icon in the Church of Our Savior and adorned it with jewels and precious stones. During this time St. Euphrasinya's parents died. Having spent all these years in monasticism, St. Euphrasinya wanted to see the holy places of the Jerusalem and bow down before the life-bearing tomb of Christ. She also was thinking of staying there to the end of her life. When all those around her found out about her intention they were filled with great sorrow. They came to her with tears imploring her not to leave her homeland and them. She in turn comforted them just as a mother comforts her children. Her brother Vyachaslau came to see her with his wife and children. With tears he asked her, "Why do you want to



Procession with the relics of St. Euphrasinya nearing Polatsk.

leave me now!". She answered, "I do not wish to leave you, but to pray for myself and for you at the holy places." When she finished comforting him she asked him to leave his two daughters, Olga and Kyriyana with her sister Eudakiya. St. Euphrasinya had a spiritual gift which allowed her to look into a persons eyes and see whether there was indeed virtue there. When her brother left she told his daughters, "I want to betroth you to the Immortal bridegroom, so as to lead you into the palace of the heavenly kingdom." After sometime she called her brother and told him that she wanted to tonsure his daughters and make them brides of Christ. Indignantly he exclaimed, "What are you plotting to do with me? You want to add to my one sorrow still another sorrow; you want me to weep, first of all because of your departure from us to a distant land. Now you want me to weep on account of my children, since I will be deprived of their consolation!"



The Cross of St Euphrasinya

Vyachaslau's wife was even more crushed and wept long and hard. But they did not oppose the words of St. Euphrasinya and accepted them as the word's of Christ for they knew her to be a true servant of Christ and a worthy receptacle of the Holy Spirit. St. Euphrasinya asked Bishop Dionysius, who was bishop at that time to tonsure the two maidens. Kyriyana was given the name Agatha and Olga was given the name Eufimiya. St. Euphrasinya handed the convent over to her sister Eudakiya and having kissed all the nuns and put her trust in Almighty God, she left for Jerusalem.

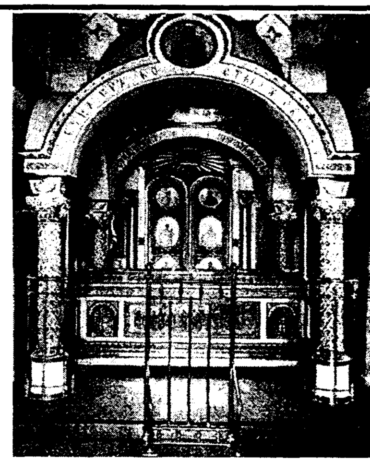
With her she took her brother David and her kinswoman Eupraksiya and first came to Constantinople. Here she was received with great honor by the emperor and patriarch. Having venerated the relics of the saints, she continued her journey to Jerusalem. She settled in a monastery dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos. Here she became ill. She wanted to go the Jordan River but was unable due to her illness. She sent her brother David and Eupraksiya there instead. They returned and brought her water from the Jordan. With great joy she drank the water and sprinkled her body with it. During her illness she had an angelic vision and was informed by God of her blessed repose and of the rest prepared for her. St. Euphrasinya then sent someone to the Lavra of St. Sabbas to ask the archimandrite and brothers if she could be buried there. They answered that they were commanded by St. Sabbas never to bury any women in his monastery. She was directed to another monastery of St. Theodosius built to the glory and honor of The Holy Theotokos. The mothers of Sts. Theodosius, Sabbas and many other Holy Women were buried there. She thanked god that her body would be placed among the relics of other saintly women. The monks prepared a grave for her burial. St Euphrasinya lay ill for another twenty four days. Having received Holy Communion and in the midst of the

prayers she gave up her soul into the hands of Almighty God on May 23, 1173. Her brother David and Eupraksiya returned home to the city of Polatsk and brought new of St. Euphrasinya's repose. Having wept over the news the faithful decided to commemorate her each year.

St. Euphrasinya is heralded by the people of Belarus at home and throughout the Diaspora. The symbol which is cherished amongst the Belarusian People is the cross which she donated to the monastery. This cross which until today is referred to as the St. Euphrasinya Cross, six pointed, was adorned with jewels, precious stones and enamel. In 1161, St. Euphrasinya commissioned a jeweler, Lazar, to create this cross. It was used to carry holy relics which were given by Emperor Manuel and Patriarch Luke. The six points of the cross represents the six days which God took to create the world. This style cross was also found in Byzantium and parts of Europe. Today, the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church uses the St. Euphrasinya Cross as a reminder of her love for God and His Holy Church, Her native Land of Belarus and its people.



In 1187 the sultan Saladin preparing to take Jerusalem allowed the Christians to leave and take their relics. Slavic monks took the relics of St. Euphrasinya and carried them in a large case designed to store relics. By all rights these relics should have been brought back to Polatsk but because there was strife between the princes of Polatsk and Kiev, the monks placed the relics in the lower church of the Pechersk-Lavra in the Ukraine. There the relics remained until 1910. I. 1871 on May 23, a portion of the relics, the center finger of the right hand, was transferred to the Monastery of Our Savior in Polatsk. In 1908 thirty bishops and over 300 priest which gathered in Kiev issued a resolution that the relics of St. Euphrasinya be returned to Polatsk in Belarus. This was approved by



A picture of the reliquary with the relics of St Euphrasinya in the church of Our Savior taken around 1910.

the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and by its procurator. On April 19, 1910, on Bright Monday, the second day of Pascha, an all night vigil was served before the relics in the lower church of the monastery. The following day the relics were placed in a cypress reliquary covered in silver designed in Byzantine style, which at that time cost 12,000 rubles, and taken outside where over twenty thousand pilgrims gathered to greet the relics. As the people of Kiev bid there farewells, people lined the roadways and waterways back to Polatsk. Finally in Polatsk the relics were brought and placed in the monastery of Our Savior where throngs of people came to venerate and greet the return of St. Euphrasinya. A nun he could not walk without assistance was allowed to venerate the Saint's right hand and immediately she felt a power within which allowed her to stand up by herself. She was witnessed by her doctor who saw that something miraculous occurred. In 1917 when the Bolsheviks came to power, Polatsk was not spared. In 1922 they desecrated the relics by unraveling and removed the monastic garb that the saint was buried in. This was done in order to perform an "archeological investigation". This affront to St. Euphrasinya and the Church was one of many examples of atrocities committed against the Holy Orthodox Church in Belarus. The relics were taken to Moscow and Vitebsk to be displayed at an atheistic exhibit held in the museums. During WW II, under German occupation, when churches were allowed to be reopened, some of the relics were brought to the church of the Protection of the Mother of God and in 1943 they were returned to Polatsk.

St. Euphrasinya never forgot her homeland and people. Throughout history the people of Belarus both in the homeland and in the Diaspora have not forgotten St. Euphrasinya. Let us pray and ask this Venerable Saint, Protectress and Patron Saint of Belarus to bring peace to Belarus, drive away the godless false leaders currently in power with their puppet collaborators and to install good leaders who love God, Belarus and its people. ***Saint Euphrasinya Pray for Us! Amen.***

FROM THE EDITOR

We are pleased to release for the third time the English version of " THE CHURCH MESSENGER". We will continue printing articles on the lives of the saints, liturgical explanations and practices in the Orthodox Church, and historical and theological issues.

On behalf of "The Orthodox Messenger", I wish to thank Reader Paul Drozdowski for contributing the iconographic and artistic sketches found in this journal. If you have any questions or wish to see a future article address a religious matter concerning the Orthodox Faith please send your requests to: ***The Church Messenger, PO Box 5982, Somerset, NJ 08875-5982.*** *Since there is no subscription at the moment, any monetary support to offset the cost of printing would be greatly appreciated. Please send any support to the same address. Thank you!*

Archimandrite Alexei, editor